

Date: 2/11/09

Testimony

State of Connecticut Legislature

Appropriations Committee

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Tracey Madden-Hennessey, I am the Associate Director of the YWCA New Britain. I am requesting that the legislature support funding for School Readiness and Early Childhood Education in the Governor's Budget. The impact of quality early childhood education on young children has a profound effect on their lifetime achievement. This is particularly so of poor children. This is a particular concern in our community where we are finally making progress on pre- school participation rates.

In addition, I was both shocked and dismayed to learn that after school funding was almost eliminated from the budget, with a reduction of \$5 million dollars. Research indicates that after school programs support children's academic achievement. They also provide structured, and safe learning environments for young people after school. In New Britain, local research indicates less than 1:4 students can enroll in after school programs. For children in poor cities, this means that less than 25% of our youth have access to after school programs that assist with academics, teach employment and training skills, and promote healthy lifestyles.

Currently, the YWCA serves more than 75 girls from New Britain in its STRIVE Youth Development Program. STRIVE targets middle school girls "at risk" of dropping out of school. More than 90% fall below HUD's guidelines for low or moderate income families. Many have older sisters or mothers who became pregnant as teens. New Britain has the second highest teen pregnancy rate in the state, far above the state average. Pregnancy prevention activities are a significant portion of our after school curriculum.

In addition, the YWCA is working to increase girls' interest in math and science activities. The program offers after school science activities accompanied by field trips to Central Connecticut State University (CCSU). Last summer, the YWCA offered a summer program for girls entirely built around a state developed after school curriculum on forensics. The program was very well received. It included field trips and learning activities at CCSU. For many this was their first opportunity to visit a college campus and for those without a family history of college participation and success, it planted the seed that college is a possibility for their future.

The YWCA enlists the assistance of forward thinking professional women in New Britain. Women in leadership roles have visited YWCA summer and after school programs to talk about their career fields, and the skills needed to be successful in school and in work. Like the girls enrolled, most of the women

are either African American or Hispanic, providing tangible evidence to our participants that they too have role models and can follow in the footsteps of these wonderful examples.

These are just a sampling of the activities available to New Britain girls, there are other wonderful programs offered to New Britain students and other youth around the state, currently supported by state funds. All of these programs are in jeopardy. All of the youth enrolled in these programs may find themselves without any after school programming to structure their time after the school day. This is a poor outcome for the youth and for our community's future.

Please reconsider funding after school programs. The future of Connecticut's children is greatly impacted by their availability and success.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Tracey Madden-Hennessey
Associate Director
YWCA New Britain